



**YOUNG DEMOCRATIC
SOCIALISTS of AMERICA**

ORGANIZING MANUAL

"Sous les pavés, la plage!"

"Beneath the cobblestones, the beach!"



SLOGAN OF THE STUDENT & WORKER GENERAL STRIKE
IN FRANCE, MAY 1968

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WHAT IS YDSA?

The Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) are the youth section of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). YDSA has a proud history of organizing for justice. As an organization of youth and student activists, YDSA was heavily involved in the movement in the eighties against apartheid in South Africa and the movement against the prison industrial complex that grew in the nineties. We continue to play a principled role in struggles for social and economic justice - fighting for change in our communities, on our campuses, at the ballot box, and beyond.

YDSA works within the broader goals and aims of DSA but has its own organizational structure and program. Anyone who is a dues-paying member of DSA below the age of 31 and either a part-time or full-time student can be a member of YDSA. YDSA elects its own national leadership, the YDSA Coordinating Committee (YDSA-CC), every year at its annual summer conference.

YDSA chapters are usually formed at a college, university, or high school. YDSA chapters can also be formed on the basis of a workplace, geography, or special focus of political activity. YDSA chapters can operate within the same jurisdiction as a DSA chapter or branch but are not necessarily subject to their authority. YDSA chapters are autonomous, both structurally and politically, but it is typically best practice for YDSA chapters to work closely with the DSA chapter in their area. YDSA chapters determine their own program and political goals. Their activism can range from working with labor campaigns to organize student workers or staff, organizing for sanctuary campuses, divesting their school from fossil fuels, or doing anti-poverty work through mutual aid programs.

As evidenced by the Civil Rights and anti-war movements of the 1960's, students and young people have played a crucial part in the transformation of American politics by providing a tremendous force for both political and cultural change. Students and youth in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) constantly pushed the Civil Rights movement forward, and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were an important part of the anti-war movement of the same time.

Socialists and young people have not only organized in their communities, but also in the educational institutions that are vital to American political culture. This is discussed in the Port Huron Statement, the founding document of SDS, which asks, "Where else can power and vision be summoned? We believe that the universities are an overlooked seat of influence. First, the university is located in a permanent position of social influence. Its educational function makes it indispensable and automatically makes it a crucial institution in the formation of social attitudes. Second, in an unbelievably complicated world, it is the central institution for organizing, evaluating and transmitting knowledge."

Colleges and universities are the places where ideas are formulated and policy is debated and developed. It is critical for YDSA to be an active part of that discussion. We have to organize effectively to change people's misconceptions about socialism, to broaden political debate, and to fight the cynicism and apathy all political groups face on and off campus today. In our daily lives, young people can help turn the tide against oppression and the myths surrounding the "virtues" of greed. Overall, YDSA fights for democratic socialism through active campaigns to improve the lives of working people.

What You Should Get Out of This Manual

This manual is intended to:

- Be useful to campus chapters. This manual may appear to have an overwhelming amount of information, but chapters can pick and choose what information will be most useful to them. Small chapters, in particular, should concentrate on the basics and recognize their limitations. Determining the minimum, medium, and maximum strategies within reach will help your chapter achieve its goals more effectively.
- Motivate chapters to organize, especially new ones. This manual is for the new generation of YDSA leadership that carries on in spite of the difficulties facing them, and who may have little or no organizing experience. Some organizers might find parts of the manual too basic. In this case, it can help you develop others who are working with you.
- Reflect the basics of organizing. This manual is about the basics of organizing: person-to-person, step-by-step. Focusing on the basics is necessary to building a lasting chapter.

STARTING A YDSA CHAPTER

The first step in forming a kick-ass YDSA chapter at your school or campus is contacting a national YDSA organizer. They will be able to give you valuable information and answer any questions you might have about the process or next steps. You will also be invited to our New Chapter Calls, which are regular conference calls for people interested in taking the first steps in starting a chapter.

Forming an Organizing Committee

Once you've spoken to someone from YDSA, it's time to start forming an Organizing Committee (OC)! The goal in forming an OC is to get three to five people who are interested in doing the work necessary to start a chapter. This should be one of their primary extracurricular projects (political or otherwise) for the near future (usually 1 to 2 years) in order to set up a strong chapter that will thrive past the period of the founding members' involvement. If you haven't already, email the YDSA national office for possible contacts in your area and on your campus. There may be none, but in larger cities, there tend to be a few YDSA members or folks who have expressed interest in building a chapter and provided their contact information to the national organization. Likely, there are a handful of members, faculty contacts, and sympathizers in your proximity, and sometimes connecting with these folks is the best way to get started. It can also be helpful to connect with the local DSA chapter to develop relationships for mentorship and peer support.

Next, talk to your friends, classmates, and co-workers. A great way to find progressive students who might find YDSA attractive is to attend meetings of organizations on your campus that address issues such as peace, civil rights, the environment, reproductive rights, worker rights, or immigration reform. Simply identify yourself as a YDSA member and offer to speak with interested people. The recruitment section of this manual discusses other ways to find new members. Check that part of the guide for advice on ads, posters, tabling, and other recruitment tactics. Keep in mind that creating a strong foundation for the chapter means recruiting a diverse OC. This is important to remember when deciding which groups to approach.

Once you have a potential OC, set up a planning meeting so you can discuss your strategy as a group. The point of an OC is to prepare for the first few general meetings and activities. At the OC meeting, be prepared to answer questions, but try to keep it as friendly and casual as possible. Make sure to have someone taking notes during the meeting so you can document and keep track of all you discuss and plan. The goals of the planning meeting are twofold: 1) planning, and, more importantly, 2) getting to know each other! Until things really start to move, you should be as recruitment-oriented as possible, even with the new OC. Your group might start with a brief discussion of what YDSA is and what Democratic Socialism is, and then talk about why you want to start a chapter and what you would like it to do. Some people may want to identify their previous political history and/or current activism and ask how YDSA fits in. **Again, remember to listen just as much as you yourself talk – this is key to organizing.** If you are unsure what to discuss in this meeting, check out the “Discussion Questions for Your First YDSA OC Meeting” handout.

Discussion Questions for Your First YDSA OC Meeting

1. Is your school residential or commuter, urban or rural? If it's commuter, are there other campus groups that are successful, and if so, how do they operate? When and where do they advertise and meet? Is it on or off campus?
2. What is the student body or community like with respect to:
 - a. ...class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion?
 - b. ...public or private?
 - c. ...size of school?
3. How much political activity is there on campus or in your community? Does something else dominate student time (sports, theatre, etc.)?
4. What are the other political groups on campus (allies, opposition, moderates), and what's the general atmosphere (left, right, relatively indifferent)?
5. Are there other socialist groups around, including in the community, and how are they viewed?
6. Do politics center around student government, single-issue groups, or identity-based groups? Is there already a multi-issue progressive group? Is there an unsatisfied interest out there that you can organize?
7. What are the politics of the Student Government Association (SGA) (for campus chapters)?
8. Are there funds for student groups, and if so, how do you get them (this is often related to the question about the politics of the SGA)? What other resources are available (materials, office space, etc.)?
9. How do you "officially" register a new group (for campus based YDSA chapters)?
10. How do you reserve rooms to meet?
11. Where do people gather on campus?
12. Where do people get their information on campus?
13. What are publicity regulations, and when are posters torn down?

Once everyone is pumped about democratic socialism and YDSA, remember to make it clear that the first order of business is to form a campus YDSA chapter. This is the best way to stay organized, maintain visibility, and be able to press your demands on your targets. After that, you can get to the more exciting stuff. Have a brief discussion of the OC's collective vision for the organization and the political landscape so you'll know how a YDSA chapter will best fit within your community. Every community is different, therefore each YDSA chapter relates to its community in a unique way. Brainstorm together which groups already exist in your area and which groups are working on goals related to yours, especially coalitions of groups. This is the "political turf" in which you'll be organizing.

If there are already tons of progressive groups, you might function as a multi-issue group that connects the dots about different forms of oppression, or as a more discussion-oriented group where all your members are active in other activist groups and you lend YDSA's name to campaigns as a coalition partner. In this case, your primary YDSA activity might be to organize film showings or book discussions and host events and social gatherings about democratic socialism and how it informs your activism. In more conservative communities you might serve as the only opposition voice to the right wing, so you'd structure your organization to initiate campaigns.

During the first OC meeting, you should float ideas but don't get wedded to specific projects, since there will soon be more members who will also want a say. Also, remember to tailor your plans to fit the resources and abilities of the people with whom you will be working. Don't create too much pressure by insisting on planning the perfect large meeting right away. A small but lasting group can slowly grow into a big one. A brilliant program followed by burnout gets you nowhere.

Planning a General Interest Meeting

Once your Organizing Committee has met, you should begin to work together to plan the first general meeting. The first general meeting is one of the most important tasks for a chapter because it launches the chapter and helps you begin to develop a strong base of active members.

At this meeting, and all others, avoid being cliquish! Remember, we're all siblings in the struggle, and no one sticks around if they feel rejected. Your first public meeting is very important. It's the time to bring in interested folks and explain YDSA, talk about activist plans, and make friends. For a lot of people, this may be the first time they've met other left-leaning folks. The meeting should be impressive, but not intimidating. It shouldn't be too formal, but it should be structured. We'll talk more about meetings later, but remember, every meeting could be somebody's first meeting, so being welcoming is key.

How to Have a Successful First Meeting

- **CHOOSE A DATE.** Consider when other groups with similar demographics already meet on campus. Consult the possible free times that you collected as part of your interest form during recruitment/ tabling. You'll never be able to find a time that 100% of people who expressed interest will be able to attend, so focus on serving the most people with the meeting time you choose.

- **CHOOSE A LOCATION.** Where will people be comfortable? The first item is securing a good location for your first general meeting. As with most meetings that you will be a part of planning in the future, it should be in a place easily accessible to the group of people that you are trying to organize, in public areas where people would be comfortable to go, at a time that would be convenient for them. Keep in mind disability and accessibility needs as you plan. In most cases, it is best to meet weekly if possible. Your first general meeting should just be the beginning of many to come. You should be able to invite new members to the next meeting the following week; otherwise, you might lose potential activists to a lull in momentum.

On campus, securing a location is often relatively easy. Most schools have meeting areas for student organizations. Often, you must be a Registered Student Organization (RSO) (or the school's equivalent) in order to book room space. (See the section later on "Becoming a Student Organization.") However, in most cases, the school is happy to allow new groups to hold meetings in some space if they are actively pursuing RSO status. If you don't have time to jump through the hoops necessary to become an RSO before you want to meet, simply have your meeting in some other public space, such as in the student union or lounge. You can also reach out to community spaces like public libraries, or hold a meeting outdoors if the weather's nice! It is not ideal, as it will provide more distractions, but if it is the only way to get the ball rolling, go for it.

- **DEVELOP AN AGENDA.** Make it interesting! The next item that should be prepared before you have the kick-off public meeting is developing an agenda: a list of items to be discussed. Otherwise, your meeting may devolve into chaos. Check out this sample agenda to help plan your own meeting!

Sample Agenda for a YDSA First General Meeting

- **Introductions** (*Under 10 mins*) *
 - Each attendee states their name, their major/job, their year in school if they'd like, and a fun fact about themselves. (A sign in sheet is passed around to collect phone number and emails.)
- **Brief Introduction to YDSA** (*5 mins*)
 - An Organizing Committee member should have a relatively brief statement about YDSA prepared (5 minutes or so). The statement should include the core unifying tenets of the organization (such as democracy, solidarity, liberty, justice, and equality), the national/international organization (people are often comforted by knowing that they are not alone in this struggle), and the types of things that a democratic socialist campus and/or community group could do (i.e., activism, discussion groups, etc.).
- **YDSA Community Agreements** (*5 minutes*)
 - An Organizing Committee member should be prepared to go over the YDSA community agreements, ask if folks have any additions, and then have the meeting attendees verbally approve them.
- **Brief Discussion on Socialism:** (*15 mins*) *
 - Go around the room and ask everyone to say why they are here today, why they are interested in socialism, and what issues they are most concerned with in America and on campus today. This discussion, if facilitated properly, can engage the new members and get them excited about doing something about issues of common concern. A great way to keep track of people's concerns and what your chapter could do about them is to write them down as people say them (best on a large piece of paper so everyone can keep track as well).
- **Outline Some Ideas for Future Goals for Your YDSA Chapter** (*15 mins*) *
 - Discuss an outline of ideas for projects that would address all these concerns, be they on campus or off campus. What feels doable? What seems most pressing?
- **Last Concerns/Announcements/Questions** (*10 mins*)

** If you have more than 15 people, it might make sense to do these parts in small groups or pairs and then have people report out at the end of the section. It's also important to remind people that in order to have time for everyone to speak, people should keep their comments brief.*

You should write down any issues, plans, questions, and comments people bring up during the meeting. Remember, if it's not written, it's not actionable.

The last item on the agenda should allow for some time for announcements. At that point, someone should also announce the time and place of the next YDSA meeting as well as what the group will be doing from now until the next meeting (i.e., how can we put these ideas into action, at the next meeting we will discuss what projects we want to work on for the year/semester, etc.). Be conscious of time - a good general membership meeting should run no longer than one hour. Keep the meeting on track and dynamic and you won't have the issue of running long.

Community Agreements

1. **USE PROGRESSIVE STACK:** Speak from your perspective, rather than assuming that of other people

Progressive Stack is a form of leading discussions which involves a facilitator keeping a list of names of people who wish to speak. The facilitator scans the group during discussion and if someone wishes to speak, they raise their hand and catch the facilitator's eye. The facilitator nods and makes eye contact to indicate the person is now put on the list to speak, and then the person can put their hand down so it does not distract other discussion participants. However, the facilitator does not simply write a list of names in the order that people raise their hand. Rather, if someone who has not spoken raises their hand, they go to the top of the list. If someone who is of an oppressed group raises their hand, they go to the top of the list unless they have already contributed significantly to the discussion.

2. **WHY AM I TALKING:** When in discussion, please ask yourself “Why am I talking (WAIT)?”

We have a limited amount of time for discussion and to accomplish the tasks before us. When in discussion, please ask yourself “Why am I talking (WAIT)?” Consider whether or not what you want to say has already been said, whether what you want to say is on topic or if there's a better time and place to say it, and other methods for showing how you feel about the conversation (nodding your head, etc.)

3. **STEP UP, STEP BACK:** When you speak, after you make your point, let others speak

Help create a safe and inclusive space for everybody. Please respect others by recognizing how often, much, and loud you're speaking and whether or not you're dominating conversation. Step back to leave space for others to voice their opinions and feelings. If the facilitator of the meeting asks you to wrap up, recognize that you should step back. This especially applies to participants who have privileged backgrounds. On the other hand, if you don't often speak up, we encourage you to do so now!

4. **USE “I” STATEMENTS:** Speak from your perspective, rather than assuming that of other people

Speak for yourself and from your own experience.

5. ONE DIVA, ONE MIC: One person speaks at a time

Many of us will have different opinions on matters. However, speaking while others are talking or adding comments when they cannot respond appropriately does not build community. If you have a disagreement, wait for your turn to address it. This is basic politeness.

6. LISTEN (DON'T WAIT TO TALK): Genuinely pay attention to what others say

Actively listen to others. When someone makes a point, repeat what you heard, and summarize.

7. ASSUME BEST INTENTIONS, BUT CHALLENGE: Give people the benefit of the doubt, but don't be afraid to challenge others when they say something you disagree with

Assume good faith in each other. Ask clarifying questions like “did you mean X” or “what makes you say that” to get more information. Encourage yourself and others to maintain a positive attitude, honor the work of others, avoid defensiveness, be open to legitimate critique and challenge oppressive behaviors in ways that help people grow. We want to “call each other in” rather than calling each other out — in other words, if you are challenging someone’s ideas or behavior, do it respectfully, and if you are being challenged, receive it respectfully.

8. OOPS, OUCH: Acknowledge when you make a mistake

Remember, mistakes will be made, nobody is perfect.

NOTE: *These rules are good practice in any organizing space, not just DSA meetings/events!*

- **AS YOU PREPARE, DIVIDE UP THE SPEAKING ROLES AND DESIGNATE A MEETING CHAIR.**

Having facilitators/speakers practice their parts can help avoid running overtime and prevent meeting-goers becoming bored or restless. You also want one person to chair the meeting and be committed to acting as the main facilitator. Facilitating is different than dominating the discussion. The chair is to facilitate the process of everyone else engaging in discussion, not to dominate with their own ideas.

Chairing YDSA Meetings

When chairing a meeting, your primary role is to facilitate group discussion and debate and help the group reach consensus on certain action points. Remember, meetings are for decisions that must be made as a group, so it's important not to waste time on other matters. Chairing is a key skill for members to develop and group leaders should take turns chairing meetings.

- **Go over the community agreements at the beginning of every meeting and ask the group to approve.** You can't hold people accountable for their behavior or ask them to act differently if they don't know what the expectations are.
- **Structure discussion and debate fairly.** Make sure there is room in the discussion for a variety of political viewpoints. Chairing a meeting is as much a political role as an administrative one.
- **Use progressive stack** or another tool to correct for the group dynamics that white supremacy and patriarchy typically inspire (i.e., white men tend to speak first and most often) and to organize discussion so that people don't talk over each other.
- **Don't be afraid to cut people off (in a comradely way)** or move forward on the agenda. You should be firm but kind; people should feel welcome and able to engage in discussion but conscious of giving others space to speak.
- **Designate a timekeeper** and make sure that person reports out the time and you keep the group on time.
- **You're not impartial, but you are there to facilitate discussion between members, not to dominate with your own ideas.** You should primarily be listening and intervening to keep the discussion on track.
- **Follow the procedure, but be flexible and able to "read the room."** If a discussion topic has been exhausted but there's still more time on the agenda for it so one person is just repeating things they've already said and everyone else appears annoyed, then you might want to ask the group if it's okay to move on.
- **Prepare!** If you know that you'll need to facilitate a discussion about sensitive topic or count votes on a contentious issue, plan in advance for how you think the meeting will go and prepare yourself for the variety of possible scenarios.

- **END ON TIME AND LEAVE FOLKS WANTING MORE!** Have a time set and don't let it drag on. If people leave before the meeting is officially over, they may not be coming back. Thank everyone for coming, announce (or decide) the next meeting time and place and make sure anyone who has agreed to do something knows what they've agreed to do. When the meeting is over, however, don't run off. People will often hang out and talk. People too timid to speak up and ask questions in the meeting may want to ask you something afterwards. Make yourself accessible. Perhaps invite everyone to go to a nearby restaurant.
- **GET THE WORD OUT ABOUT THE MEETING AND MAKE TURNOUT CALLS.** You can't have a meeting if no one attends! We're all in YDSA because we have a vision for a better future. But we can't get there alone, so we need to spread the word and find other folks who want to join us in the movement for justice. Especially when you're starting out, it's important to create a good "buzz" on campus. Be sure to do as much publicity as possible, especially about your first general meeting or kick-off event: for example, you might put up banners, set up a table in a busy part of campus, chalk campus walkways, or ask sympathetic professors to make announcements or let you come to their class. Making a Facebook event can also be a great way to invite a large amount of people on your campus to an event, but make sure to go beyond the internet and utilize more personal means of communication too. Make turnout calls one or two days before your event. All of the names and phone numbers that you have collected over the past days/weeks of tabling and talking to people should now be put to good use. Remember, whenever you are compiling personal information to follow these information security recommendations from DSA's Information Security Working Group. They will come in handy every time you are planning an event, having a meeting, or anything else that might require your YDSA chapter's public face. Since all of these people signed your list, they'll be at least interested in what you have to say. If you do this, you are more likely to get a greater number of people that signed up at your table to your meeting.
It's also good to contact other friendly organizations (such as progressive, identity-based, or student/community groups, etc.) and faculty via listserv emails, social media posts on their pages, and face-to-face conversations. Let them know of your first meeting (provide them with a flyer/poster to share with their group), invite members, and state your willingness to work with them once you are organized. The important thing is to spread the energy and excitement around. If people feel like this organization is better equipped to actually do something, and if you all have such a good time doing it, then people will surely be drawn to your group. Think creatively about recruitment and focus on making the meeting fun and engaging and you'll be sure to get folks out there!
- **LET YDSA NATIONAL KNOW ABOUT YOUR MEETING!** After your first interest meeting you should email or text your contact with YDSA national to let them know about your progress. The national tends to give more active support to groups that are actively organizing so it's important to inform them of your progress.

RECRUITMENT

To get the word out, start by talking to people about YDS, what it is, and why we need it. It's great to start out by talking to your friends about YDS, but you should go further than that too. If your chapter is going to be strong and stable, it has to be built on organized students and not just circles of friends. There are a lot of great methods for getting the word out:

CLASS RAPS — Standing up at the end of class and giving a 60 second pitch for YDSA. This can be intimidating but it is one of the best ways to get new people involved!

POSTERS AND FLYERS — Putting up posters in high traffic areas of the school or passing out flyers about YDSA around high traffic times during the day. Flyering is also a great way to start a conversation with people who might be interested.

ENGAGE WITH YOUR SCHOOL PAPER — Write an article for the school paper about YDSA.

SOCIAL MEDIA — Start a Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook account to get the word out and publicize activity. See the next section for more guidance on social media use.

Social Media

It is no secret that social media is one of YDSA's greatest tools. One of our great strengths is our members' sense of humor and irreverence. Whereas the socialist left has a long tradition of being dour and joyless, our members are full of off-the-wall jokes and dank memes. None of us want to be in an organization where folks can't laugh. But we have to check our language and action on the internet sometimes, and act with a sense of discipline - especially in the face of those who want to see us fail.

We all recognize that the growth of DSA and YDSA in the last year is the most exciting development on the U.S. left in decades. That's why many folks joined. But we aren't the only ones who recognize this - our enemies do, too. They may be prowling around online, trying to derail us by goading comrades into saying or doing something stupid. They'll probably do their best to get a screenshot, then send it out into the world. It's happened before and we want to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Don't give in to those who want to see YDSA fail. Don't engage with trolls of any kind - left-wing sectarians, right-wing media, provocateurs, or anyone else - online from YDSA accounts or in real life at protests or events. Feel free to debate and argue, but acknowledge when what you are doing might be harmful to your organization.

Avoid loose talk online and in person. You may be tempted to lob a cutting comment toward a conservative as a joke from a YDSA account. But what's hilarious to you and your comrades on social media will be spun by the trolls to be as damaging to the DSA and YDSA as possible. Don't talk to them.

Do not provide them fuel. When you're online, remember: Your behavior won't just reflect you. It could impact all of your comrades. Too much is on the line for us to act carelessly in the face of those who want to see the latest wave of socialism collapse before it even gets off the ground. Be smart and stay disciplined in the face of confrontation.

We should be stoic in the face of our enemies. But we have to be warm, understanding, assuming of good faith, and even loving in the presence of our comrades. We have to model the kind of world we want to see in our interactions with each other because that sense of comradeship and love and loyalty to one another is a requirement for our organization to function and thrive. Please see below for detailed guidelines to use when posting from a YDSA account or your own YDSA-affiliated account.

General Guidelines for Social Media Content

ANTI-CAPITALISM. We oppose capitalism as an economic and political system. Capitalism is an undemocratic and exploitative system that serves only a small fraction of society at the detriment of the overwhelming majority. Content that draws attention to the wasteful, undemocratic, and exploitative nature of capitalism is good!

FIGHT THE RIGHT. We oppose right wing politics, whether it is the Republican Party or the so-called Alt-Right, a veiled fascist movement. Content that draws attention to the anti-worker and ruthlessly pro-corporate policies of the Republican Party is good!

CHALLENGE THE NEOLIBERAL WING OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. For decades there has been a growing neoliberal, centrist wing of the Democratic Party that, while progressive on some issues, is fundamentally opposed to the power of working people to determine their destiny. Today, the vast majority of the leadership of the Democratic Party belongs to this wing. Content that draws attention to the neoliberal, centrist wing of the Democratic Party is good!

INTERSECTIONALITY. Capitalism is fundamentally opposed to resolving the oppression of sections of society. YDSA is pro-racial justice, pro-feminist, pro-queer, pro-trans. Content that draws attention to these issues is good!

STUDENT POWER. Worker Power. YDSA strongly supports campaigns, actions, and movements to grow the power of students and working people to have control of their communities, workplaces, campuses, and lives. Content that draws attention to these issues is good!

NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE. YDSA is a non-violent organization. Content that highlights political violence in a favorable light of any kind should not be engaged with in any way.

MULTI-TENDENCY. Multi-issue. Please keep in mind that DSA is a multi-tendency, multi-issue organization. Out of respect for the hard work of your comrades, it's important to avoid content that excludes specific or multiple tendencies. This could range from content that would be specifically favorable to a specific YDSA tendency (such as democratic Marxist, left social democratic, or religious socialist) at the exclusion of another, or even content that would be uncritically supportive of specific centrist Democrats or progressives. (It's a fine line to ride, I know, but please use your discretion).

Good things to keep in mind when posting...

- Remember that you are representing YDSA as a whole.
- Stay positive. Ignore trolls and block them if they are causing too much trouble.
- Avoid inside language, jokes, and jargon. Avoid references or words that only long-standing activists would know.
- Try to avoid words or references that only people who are committed leftists will understand. *Examples:* Marxist-Leninist, Trotskyism, entryism, etc. This in no way means that the content itself (articles, essays, etc.) can never mention complex terms and concepts.
- Encourage unity. Unity is necessary to build a broad, socialist movement. Avoid divisiveness.
- Try to avoid offensive language, expletives, slurs, etc.

Postering, Chalking, Bannering, and Tabling

While social media can be a very effective recruiting source, there are many other methods of recruitment that are more direct and engaging than the internet. Check out this section for guidance on some classic recruitment tactics.

Postering

Keep it short, simple, loud, and eye-catching. Make your main message BIG - people should be able to see it from fifteen feet away. Make the rest of your text pithy - people should be able to read it in one minute. Keep it visually consistent - more than two fonts or more than two colors is distracting. Don't make it too crowded by filling every space on the page. In fact, leaving blank space calls attention to the text. Pictures and graphics can really add to a poster if they are clear and powerful - and head shots of unappealing folks like Trump are always good. Don't forget to clearly lay out the time, date, and place of the event or meeting you are advertising. Different versions can attract a diverse group of people - where some may be attracted to an advertisement with verbose elements, others may appreciate sarcasm and humor.

Where and when to poster: High-traffic areas such as dining halls, campus centers, etc. are good places. You will be competing for space and attention with every other group on campus. Don't limit your posting to one area of campus or just high-traffic areas. There are many good spots to poster where you have a "captive audience" which has nothing to do but read your poster. Bathroom stalls, cafeteria lines, and bus stops are a few such places. On most campuses, bulletin boards are cleared of posters regularly. Put your posters up in remote areas several weeks in advance. Re-poster high-traffic areas several times leading up to the event, with a final blitz a day or two before.

Off-campus, coffee shops, and local hangouts are great places. Depending on the event, it may be good to put up posters at local community organizations or unions. Many supermarkets have bulletin boards where people can post things. Be sure you know the rules/ordinances surrounding posting and how they are enforced. Don't waste an entire afternoon putting posters on telephone poles or bulletin boards if the city or school takes them down every night or is scheduled to do so the day after you put them up.

What to poster: Posters are great for events, from rallies to film festivals, but are even more useful if they apply to more than one thing. General posters, with a clever, eye-catching design or message, alert people to your group's existence and meeting times. If you don't change your meeting time and place, one poster can reach people for months.

Chalking

"Chalking" is the more legal and temporary equivalent of graffiti and spray painting. Groups have used chalked body outlines to call attention to human rights abuses or oppose war and other military action. Chalking is inexpensive as it doesn't require paper or printing costs. It is also quite effective as the words and messages can be as large and creative as you are able. Campus rules differ from location to location on whether or not this activity is permissible. Campus police have been known to dissuade and threaten

chalkers (especially those conveying a political message instead of the more socially relevant frat party). Try to keep chalking limited to sidewalks, as it doesn't wash off as readily on buildings and chalk is damaging if it remains too long on brick or concrete.

Bannering

With a can of spray paint or ink pens, and a large sheet or butcher paper, you can create your own banner. Depending upon your local laws, you might be able to stand on an overpass, so that every car driving below sees the message. Standing on a street corner during rush hour is just as effective, as is hanging a banner in a campus student union or out your dorm window if you're in a high-traffic area. Keep your message simple and easy to read, and be prepared to answer questions if you are in an area with foot traffic.

Tabling

Tabling is absolutely, positively the best way to reach people and get new members. Essentially, you set up a table in a public spot, put out some literature and buttons, and talk to interested people. The best place to table is on a college campus, in a well-trafficked area. Early in the semester is best, when you'll have a chance to talk to new students, and when people haven't yet signed up for other clubs and activities. Tabling is also a great way for new members to become more comfortable discussing democratic socialism and answering questions. It can seem daunting at first, but once you've "observed" older chapter members in action and gotten used to it, it's easy and can even be fun.

Check with University officials on tabling regulations. Some schools don't care where or when you set up, but a lot of schools will have set times or places or forms to fill out. Sometimes, you'll also be able to get a table at student activities fair early in the year, which is a really great idea if you can manage it.

First, you need a table. Again, check with the university. Generally speaking, the Student Center (or its equivalent) will be able to provide a table or tell you where to get one. If they don't have one to use, check with a friendly professor or another activist group. As a rule of thumb, it's never a bad idea to check with an ally group on dealing with the university administration. They've gone through it already, and it gives you an excuse to talk to people who you'll need to be working with in the future. If all else fails, you can always buy a folding table. They're generally under \$50. Other than that, you'll want to have:

- **Literature.** Have a few different handouts on different colored paper if possible. These are available from the YDSA office. If there is a local issue of importance at the moment, make literature about that.
- **Sign-up sheet.** Printed sign up sheets are good, but creating your own digital sign up sheet through a service like Google Forms or Airtable is more secure. Label it at the top, and have columns with plenty of space for name, phone number, and email. You can add street address, but you probably won't be doing any mailings any time soon. Sign yourself up at the top; nobody likes to be the sucker to sign up first.
- **Pens and pencils.** Easy to forget.

- **Swag.** Buttons, bumper stickers, and anything else you can give away for donations.
- **A donation tin.**
- **People.** Have at least two people at all times. A hostile interrogator or tricky question can overwhelm someone on their own. Also, it's more fun with more people. If you're tabling from 10am to 2pm, have people take shifts. Make sure two hot-headed arguers don't table together. You know, different strokes for different folks.
- **A sign.** It can be as simple as something on a piece of poster board, but you want to make sure people walking by know who you are and what issues you're working on.

Make sure that you are accessible. Say hi to people, hand out fliers to people walking by. Don't just sit back and read. You don't want to be pushy or obnoxious, but you do want to be engaging. Answer questions; invite people to events or meetings. Encourage people to sign up. Make sure that political disagreements with antagonists don't turn into shouting matches.

Communicating with Prospective Members

There are many important points that differentiate YDSA from other activist groups that can be used as hooks to draw in new members: **1) we do multi-issue organizing**, which helps draw the connections between different forms of oppression. But, we go beyond that; **2) we name the system (capitalism) as part of a broader analysis of power relations**, unlike many multi-issue groups. But, unlike some other anti-capitalist groups, **3) we take electoral politics seriously**. We can use our privilege to improve oppressed people's lives now as well as our own, rather than throwing ourselves against the entire capitalist system ineffectually. There is no telling what a grassroots, mass movement of ordinary people around socialist ideals could accomplish if we could move our dreams and analysis from the fringe to more involved practices of politics. Also, unlike some other lefty groups, **4) we have a democratic structure and encourage debate and discussion**, rather than forcing adherence to a particular viewpoint or "party line." Finally, related to the previous point, **5) we unite theory and practice** - we both struggle in the streets and develop our socialist ideas and educate each other through discussion.

Making Leftists Out of Liberals

Many YDSA members, maybe even yourself included, were likely first introduced to leftist thought via liberal thought. Many self identified "liberals" aren't even aware that they are, in fact, democratic socialists. It is usually pretty easy to convince these people to join. Below are comments that you will probably hear from these folks and suggested responses:

"Socialism is such a bad word. I'd rather be in a multi-issue organization that doesn't use the word 'socialism.'"

Anything that truly challenges capitalist power will be red-baited anyway. The society that we want to live in, whatever we call it, one of justice and democracy, won't be achieved without confronting the unequal distribution of power in the economy. Struggles for practical reforms, like better labor laws or increased environmental protection, can only go so far if they aren't united

by a vision of comprehensive social change. That vision, if it is radically democratic and anti-corporate, will be denounced as socialist by its enemies, even if we couch it in generic “progressive” terms. It is important that we, not them, define what socialism means.

“I’d rather work on a concrete issue or campaign that can get something done.”

YDSA is the place for you. We welcome and encourage people involved in single issue or “identity politics” work to join us. You don’t have to give up your activism in the Queer Pride Alliance to be a socialist, and YDSA locals always get involved in broader multi-issue umbrella groups. If you think that both long-term and short-term political goals are important, why not continue this work as a democratic socialist?

“Looks good on paper, but it will never happen, so why waste my time in a socialist group?”

We can’t deal with capitalism without socialism. You can try to build progressive movements without using the word socialism, but this is difficult to do without identifying the main problem - capitalism. Once you start talking about capitalism and trying to do something real to take away the problems that it causes, people are going to label you or your politics as socialist. Until we can have a frank discussion in this country about capitalism (and, therefore, about a socialist alternative), we won’t be able to really tackle the major problems facing society.

When answering these points, remember that none of these concerns are completely invalid. America is a strange place to be a radical. In other countries, many trade unionists, students, and other progressives would identify themselves as some sort of socialist. Progressive Americans must deal with a peculiar situation. What may seem like a cop-out is really more of a coping mechanism. Help them cope.

Tips for Recruiting Other Activists

On the personal level, never harass someone to join before they’ve begun to think of themselves as a socialist or as having politics close to ours. Offer to put them on the email list as a non-threatening first step. Once they’re close, invite them to join. Some people think they are members because they hang out with the local or are on the local email list, but they have never joined.

Always let people know they are part of a national and international movement. Make sure to talk about what other locals are doing and what projects the national is involved in coordinating. Bring folks to national events so that they can feel connected to the national organization.

- Organizing is all about building relationships. As you meet and work with people on campus, it’s important to build those relationships. Try and establish regular contact with one or two people in a particular group. See if you can meet with them for coffee or lunch to talk about how you both got involved in campus activism, what you’re planning in the near future, and how your groups can support each other in growing your work.
- Get a reputation for being the best coalition partners and organizers in town. Be friendly and open, committed to the larger causes you are working for as well as to YDSA. But make sure that people know that the reason that you are there is the sense of commitment that you have as a YDSA member. Talk one-on-one with people in coalitions who seem curious about us. Give them some literature and invite them to meetings. Don’t thrust literature into everyone’s face before every left gathering, but don’t let even mild interest go by without a response.

Tips for Recruiting the General Public

- Always be visible and always be proud. Show your best face to the world, whether it be the most attractive, numerous banners at a rally, or the most interesting, properly staffed literature table.
- Always give a good rap about the organization at new member meetings or meetings where lots of new folks are present. Make the group sound like all the things they want: activist yet reflective, committed yet friendly, militant yet with a sense of humorous perspective. Don't forget to invite new folks to hang out in a non-meeting, social setting. Invite them to join the email list. That's not as threatening as joining the organization.
- Emphasize our commitment to democracy. Let people know that we stand with the democratic socialists internationally who struggle to expand democracy into the economy in the face of growing corporate power.
- Accentuate the positive. Don't stuff your rap with answers to every objection people have made in the past. Your audience may never have thought of those objections.
- Consciously work to reach beyond the radical subculture. Initiate on dialoguing with liberals and progressives, not just with "activists." While the key activists in your local, and yourself, may come from this subculture, this social circle can become a very comfortable trap. The growth of the democratic left is going to come from many sources. We are an effective recruiting organization when we pull in the most active people to our left, and while engaging progressives who are exploring radical ideas and democratic socialist politics.
- Finally, always remember to stress that American politics is warped because of the absence of a respected, visible, democratic socialist movement. Stress to left liberals that none of the reforms they care about, from universal health care to environmental protection to affirmative action, can be won without a movement willing to take on corporate power directly; a movement willing to directly challenge capitalist political priorities; a movement willing to overturn the stigma that has been given to socialism, for that is what keeps America from achieving even the minimal welfare state that has been built by socialists in all other industrialized democracies. It takes a socialist movement.

BECOMING AN OFFICIAL CHAPTER

Becoming a Recognized Student Organization

Depending on your school, this will almost certainly be more difficult than becoming a YDSA chapter. Schools may require a minimum number of student members (5-15), a faculty advisor, or a constitution, and will probably make you sit through some boring meetings. However, this is almost always worth it. Registered Student Organizations can get money and even office space at some schools. Doing things on campus (like booking rooms) will be easier if you are registered, and may be impossible if you are not. Contact the University to find out the exact procedure to get recognized. Find out all the resources you can get, and exploit the hell out of them. Establish good relations with the office of student activities on your campus, since antagonizing them can endanger the chapter status as a registered club. Know deadlines and learn all the bureaucratic procedures necessary for chapter events, and investigate all the possibilities for achieving a more visible presence on campus.

Some schools may block you from becoming an RSO, in which case you should call the YDSA national office for ideas. Often if you're being blocked from forming an official chapter for bogus reasons, other progressive groups are too, and it may be something you can build a coalition around and fight the administration to distribute resources more fairly to student groups. (For example, a Rutgers University YDSA chapter was told that they were too similar to other political groups on campus, even though there are only College Democrats and College Republicans, of which we are clearly neither, and no socialist groups!)

Problems (and Solutions) for High School Chapters

One of the major differences between high school and college students is that most high school students can't vote (because they are under 18), and thus often feel alienated from the political process. That being said, political campaigns are some of the best ways to energize people and get them to think about issues. Political campaigns are always in need of volunteers to knock on doors in neighborhoods and make phone calls and are glad to take high school students. Working on an exciting progressive campaign will help you meet other activists and can make a concrete difference. This is best done when there is a truly progressive candidate around, not a right-wing corporate politician, and it is important to make sure that your activism doesn't stop when the election season does. It is also important to remember that YDSA is nonpartisan and does not do any electoral work as YDSA, so you should get together with political campaigns or other organizations that are helping out to do your work. Organizing mock elections can excite people that are normally apolitical and can be a fun, educational thing to do. They also tend to attract local media that are overjoyed to see that kids are excited about politics, so you can perhaps present your socialist politics to the community-at-large.

At some point in your organization, you will almost certainly begin working with older activists, either from college groups in the area or professional activists. While most are delighted to help you out, sometimes they can adopt a patronizing attitude, treating you like a small child instead of a passionate,

intelligent activist. Make sure you let them know that you are a young adult deserving of respect and make your voice heard as loudly as anyone else's. That being said, it's always good to have older, more experienced activists around that can mentor and support individual YDSA members or chapters as a whole.

At this age, most students are still living with their parents, and are thus subject to the rules that their parents impose. While some parents are very supportive of activists and think trying to change the world is a positive thing, others can be less inclined to think this way and might seek to prevent their children from being active or attending conferences and protests. This is something to keep in mind when organizing, but it is important to understand that even though some people may be restricted from being active with your chapter, by exposing them to democratic socialist politics you have laid the foundation for them to be active in the future.

Things to keep in mind when talking to parents are that just because YDSA has "socialist" in their name doesn't mean that we are unreasonable fanatics with fantasies of storming the Capitol. We seek to create concrete improvements in people's lives. Usually, all but the most restrictive parents can be brought to reason if you have a good grasp of the issue you are discussing and explain why it is important that you be allowed to organize around it. Again, if you are having parental issues, you can call the YDSA office and we can give you some tips tailored to your particular situation.

Petitioning for National Recognition

YDSA chapters become officially recognized by filling out a formal application. Once that is submitted it will then be processed by the national and sent to the Coordinating Committee (the national elected leadership of YDSA) for approval. This process usually takes about a week. Ask whoever you're in touch with from the YDSA national for more information and guidelines about applying for official recognition.

What happens once you're an official chapter? There are a couple things that happen once you become official:

Listed on the national website. Your chapter and your contact information will be listed on the national DSA and YDSA websites. This will allow potential members to more easily contact you about getting involved.

Connected with other YDSA chapters. You will be added to a number of support networks, including the national YDSA email list, so you can contact other chapter leaders and stay in touch with the national work.

Priority Support. Often times YDSA will have national initiatives or campaigns that we will be organizing to give support to locals. When these happen, we usually prioritize support to official chapters in terms of material help and resources.

BECOMING A STRUCTURED CHAPTER

Choosing a Leadership Structure

As your chapter grows, you'll need to decide how it should operate. It is important that as your chapter gets going that it has structure. Structure can seem abstract, and it can certainly be a distraction if it is fixated on as a substitute for active work, but it is also essential for making sure that your chapter and all your members are supported. A clear, approachable, and accountable structure is essential to try and work through early on. If you wait for a big pop in membership or interest before working out guidelines for how your chapter will operate, often this growth will simply slip through your hands. Usually this structure is outlined in your chapter constitution. College chapters must often submit a constitution to their school to be recognized. A constitution is simply a written list of a group's structure and process. Check out the resources on the national website for a link to a sample constitution you can use.

Electing Officers

Electing officers is one of the simplest and most efficient forms of democratic leadership. Typically, chapters will elect a Chair, Vice-chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. See the "Elected Officer Positions" section for descriptions of each role. The selection of leaders must always be done democratically, by a vote. If the election is non-contentious, elections can be held through acclamation, which is when the group is asked if anyone opposes the candidate or slate (a group of candidates running together) proposed. If there is no opposition, the candidate or slate is elected. If elections are contentious, voting can occur through a show of hands or a ballot election.

Elected Officer Positions

Co-Chair/s: Co-Chair/s should act as official public spokespersons for the chapter and should help carry out actions and plans the chapter membership is in favor of. Co-Chair/s should organize and preside over all official meetings of the chapter. They should also maintain consistent communication with all committee leaders and facilitate collaboration and coordination between them and other members of the chapter. We suggest that you require in your constitution that at least one Co-Chair must not identify as both white and cis-male.

Vice-Chair: The Vice-Chair is responsible for helping the Co-Chair/s with all of their duties. If both Co-Chairs are unable to carry out their roles, the Vice-Chair can carry out those duties and assume responsibilities of the Co-Chairs until one or both Co-Chairs are able to resume their roles.

Secretary: The Secretary is responsible for taking minutes of all chapter meetings, and then posting or emailing these minutes to the chapter. The Secretary can appoint a temporary proxy minutes-taker for any meeting. The Secretary takes on the responsibilities of one of the Co-Chairs if both Co-Chairs and the Vice-Chair are unable to do so. In many chapters, the secretary is responsible for communications within the chapter, and making sure every member gets the information they need.

Treasurer: The Treasurer is responsible for keeping track of the budget, funds, and fundraising efforts of the chapter. This person should not be primarily in charge of fundraising but should be responsible for keeping on top of the chapter's financial picture and record keeping. The Treasurer should frequently report to the chapter on the finances. They should make sure all finance tracking is transparent and open for all members to see if requested. Check out the "Finances" section in this chapter for more info on handling your chapter's money.

Delegating Work: Forming Internal Committees

All YDSA chapters, no matter how large or small, need people to maintain and build the chapter. While some chapters might already have a set leadership structure, it is helpful to form committees to spread the responsibility of this vital work. These committees could be as small as two members or could involve the entire leadership for short campaigns. Many times these committees will be composed only of leadership types but efforts should be made to include other interested members! The committees may meet regularly or they may meet only for needed mobilizations. Here are some ideas for potential committees within your chapter. You do not need to have all of these committees. Tailor your committees to your chapter's needs.

Membership Committee: This committee should keep track of the membership list, make sure members are renewing, develop campaigns for recruiting new members, follow up on possible recruits, and conduct recruitment and orientation meetings for prospective and new members. During the summer of each year, the committee should attempt to personally contact all members to keep up interest. Also, the committee should plan at least one membership drive each year. Several times a year, the committee should conduct a recruitment and/or orientation meeting where YDSA nationally and locally should be presented for new and prospective members.

Fundraising Committee: This committee should plan occasional (maybe once a semester) fundraising events or campaigns, and keep accurate records of money raised. It should also be responsible for looking into receiving funding from your school or campus. Remember we live under capitalism so without money nothing happens.

Political Education Committee: This committee should be responsible for the political education of the chapter. This can be one of the most beneficial committees for a YDSA and should meet regularly to plan events like reading and discussion groups, movie nights, or trainings to keep the group well informed and educated about our work and how we can best accomplish it.

Communications Committee: This committee could be responsible for producing a chapter zine or other form of chapter literature. It should also develop a plan for calling most members to remind them of meetings, mobilizations, etc. The committee should be able to ask people not on the committee to make calls. This committee should also have the ability to do some media work to publicize your meetings, special events, etc.

Socialist Socializing Committee: This committee should work to get people together to have fun! There are few better ways to create a sense of organizational solidarity than taking the time to enjoy each other's company. This committee should organize social events, such as game nights, parties, or day trips. This committee is vital if the chapter is to avoid burnout in its activists and integrate new members.

General Campaign Committees: Once a chapter has determined what issues are the most relevant in their community, they should form a committee to guide campaigns on those topics. Many chapters have campaigns around Anti-Racism and Socialist Feminism. Some have Eco-Socialist campaigns that work on issues relating to climate change and environmental justice. The committee can take on any issue in your community, from immigrant rights to campus workers rights. The committee should focus on analyzing issues in your area and determining what your chapter can do about them. The "Becoming an Effective Chapter" section of this manual has more guidance on how to take action and lead campaigns.

Social Media Committee: These Internal Committees are not the most glamorous activities for YDSA members to become involved in. Part of the trick to building them is in making the activity of the committee as political as possible and in making their work integral to the work of the chapter. The other trick is to ask your members to help. Most members, particularly those who can't afford to give money to the chapter, will contribute their time to these committees if asked.

Working with Local Groups

Outreach and principled coalition work are crucial to building and maintaining an activist organization that can actually make social change, and to help create a democratic socialist movement that many people can consider their political home. Developing a good relationship and reputation with other organizations is imperative to getting anything done. YDSA has some name recognition on the Left, and your local will develop a name for itself as well. As your reputation precedes you, it is vital to maintain strong, healthy connections with allies, not just for the work at hand, but also for future campaigns and for building the movement.

The first step in working with other groups is getting in touch with them. Identify your potential allies. Working in coalition with other progressive organizations is an important way to strengthen the left presence on campus and in your community. Building coalitions is a way to articulate our socialist perspective to a broader audience while helping to move forward a cause or issues we believe in. Chapters, however, should always work in coalition for the sake of the issue, not as a recruiting tactic.

Unions, progressive churches, other student groups, and community organizations are all potential allies. Look through the local paper to see if any groups have meeting times listed. Drop by and observe. Introduce yourself and say you're looking forward to working with them and helping out. Don't be surprised if they're not overly impressed. Community organizations that have been around have seen student organizations come and go. Many may have had bad experiences with other, more dogmatic socialists in the past.

Unions are generally willing to work with YDSA. Many union officers are familiar with YDSA and may be members. Making contacts with local labor will be very important for all of your future organizing. See the section on unions under “Becoming an Effective Chapter” for more guidance on working with unions. While many unions will be receptive to the YDSA name, other groups will be wary. This is often even truer when the constituency of the organization is mostly people of color.

The only way to fix this is by working well over a period of time. Be respectful and demonstrate a willingness to do long term political work. The only way to do this is with time, but a few key elements will help you get started in working with other groups:

Follow through. If you say you can do something, or get so many people to an event, be sure and do it. If you’re not able to follow through, be honest and upfront about it.

Spend wisely. If you get money from a union or group, put it to good use. Show them that they didn’t waste the money. They’ll be more willing to give you money in the future, and generally more trusting.

Show up. Invite people to your events, and show up to theirs. After all, that’s what solidarity is all about.

Be sincere. Be clear and upfront about what you want to get out of working with other groups. It’s not difficult to build a good relationship if you deal with other groups honestly and respectfully, and know when and how to be a good ally.

Collaborate. Our best allies are progressive groups, for example, feminist, people of color, and environmental clubs. At the national level, YDSA works with a loose alliance of progressive student organizations as well as more formalized coalitions. We strongly encourage you to work with these kinds of organizations on your campus, and contact the YDSA national office for local contact information or help brainstorming who you should approach.

It’s very important to keep a balance between coalition work and organizing events and projects under the name of your YDSA chapter. Both are important – we need a larger, vibrant left community in which to work, but we also have to get our own name and ideas out to the public, which means doing things on our own, as well.

Finances

Every organization needs money to keep it going, and YDSA is no different. Without funds, nothing, or almost nothing, happens. Too often, we look at fundraising as just a means to get money. But it can be so much more. Fundraising should be an integral part of activities of the chapter, political or not. Fundraising can be a way to involve your membership, gain publicity for your chapter, project your public politics, develop the social and cultural life of the chapter, and build a skilled leadership as well as gain financial independence and self-sufficiency. The keys to successful fundraising are simple: asking again and again, maximizing your proceeds, making long-range plans, varying your fundraising activities, repeating your successes, keeping accurate records, finding and utilizing your donors’ self-interest, and making it fun.

Opening a Bank Account

Even though you won't start out with much money, this is a good thing to do. Many banks will let small, non-profit groups open free checking accounts. Your school may provide a service for recognized groups. Either way, this is a good idea and will make things a lot easier. People are more willing to donate if they make the check out to "Young Democratic Socialists of America, Metropolis University," as opposed to "Lex Luthor." You will need to get a taxpayer ID number in order to open a bank account. These are available from the IRS, even online.

Buying Stuff

There are a few things you may want to consider purchasing early on. A second-hand bullhorn or megaphone can be found on the Internet for around \$50 if you plan to do some major campaigning. Newer or nicer ones cost more, but having a bullhorn will make any protest or rally much easier (and louder). If your chapter plans on being an active, noise-making group, it's a must have. A button-maker is also a great investment. Having buttons every time you table is a great way to make money and spread your message. Other items will come up, of course, which brings us to...

Raising Money

A typical YDS chapter will have a small budget, dominated by printing costs. Other things that might come up would include one time purchases (a bullhorn or table, for instance), infrastructure costs, travel costs for national or regional protests or YDS conferences and events, and costs for an event (rental and refreshments for a film showing, perhaps). Money can come from several sources.

First, you can make clear asks to members. Your chapter members can pay dues to the chapter as well as the national, to give your bank account a little starting money. Members will often put up a little cash for small, spontaneous expenditures, but don't expect anyone to enjoy making a habit of it. Regular tabling can bring in some donations, especially if you're talking about a hot-button issue at the time. For more money, you're going to have to solicit donations.

Next, try the school. For registered organizations, there will be a process for applying to the school for money. For example, at the University of Chicago, the YDS chapter was able to get several thousand dollars to host a two-day Midwest Academy organizing training on campus, provided they made it open to all members of the university community and made a formal proposal for the money months in advance.

Besides the school, ask local unions, faith-based organizations, or community organizations with wealthier members than your student run YDSA chapter. Typically, older leftists are more than willing to hand over money to younger activists. They give the money; we give our time and energy. The most important thing in asking for money is telling people what it is for and then using it well. While a union or group may be willing to give you a small start-up donation, after that, they're much more willing to give you money if you are asking for a specific reason, and can point to other times when you used their donation well.

Anytime you have an event, pass the hat, or ask for donations at the door. You usually can't charge admission if you're showing a film, but you can always ask people to make donations. Your asks should always be concrete (going to a specific cost of goal) and specific ("We would like you to donate \$5...").

Finally, you should also consider having events that function solely as fundraisers. Having a friend's band play or throwing a "Socialist Party" can be a great way to raise money and put the social in socialism. Throwing joint parties with other student/activist orgs can be fun and encourage greater cooperation between groups.

BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE CHAPTER

Organizing Regular Meetings

Meetings are places where you organize people to get things done that you can't and shouldn't do yourself. Regular meetings are the most used format for bringing the membership of YDSA together and are, whatever their focus, essential to building a successful organization. Regardless of their size or function, all meetings share several purposes. They give people an opportunity to participate, they build solidarity, they develop the political work of the group, and they make decisions that affect the entire group. Successful meetings have three components: information sharing, decision-making and problem solving, and work delegation.

Information sharing should be the first part of any meeting and should be brief and well organized. Information sharing includes introductions (especially of new people), a quick rundown of the agenda, and an update on what has happened since the last meeting, including reports from subgroups of the body. Everyone present should be encouraged to participate to help get the meeting going.

When **decision-making and problem solving**, the decisions to be made or the problems at hand need to be clearly laid out. The goal of this section of the meeting is to determine what needs to be done, and how it can best be accomplished. If this part is well organized you will avoid long winded digressions and repetitions. A good balance between involving people in the discussion and moving the meeting along at a reasonable pace will prevent people from getting bored.

Work delegation is probably the most important part of the meeting. Everybody who comes to a meeting should leave with something to do, however small. Tasks should be described clearly and volunteers should be solicited. Don't be afraid of encouraging people or of assigning tasks. Often people don't offer to help because they're not confident in their own abilities. Keep in mind that most people wouldn't have come if they didn't want to get involved, but that they may be too shy to come forward to volunteer themselves. Be sure that when the tasks are delegated you differentiate between those that need experienced members to complete and those that don't and that tasks assignments aren't segregated by traditional gender, racial, and class biases.

The importance of preparing and having good meetings cannot be overstressed. People won't return to a group that cannot hold their interest. Meetings that are all business are boring for everybody but the most committed, while meetings without an activist purpose breed suspicions that "we don't do anything." Most importantly, meetings should reflect the politics of the organization, and how those politics translate into action.

Someone or some group of members must be responsible for preparing for any meeting. There has to be given some thought as to the purpose of the meeting. There is also a lot of planning and work that has to be done to ensure the success of any meeting. What follows are several steps and tips that outline how to prepare and conduct a meeting:

First, **develop a clear purpose** for the meeting. Decide what it is that you want to accomplish with the meeting. Again, aim for action and political content, and possible activities that could be undertaken between meetings.

Plan an agenda: List the topics to be covered, who will talk about them, and possible discussion questions or action decisions related to each topic. Put agenda items in a logical order. Think through a process for each item, including presentation and discussion, decision-making, etc., depending on each agenda item. Keep the agenda short by placing a time limit on each item. Don't try to cover too many items if you expect to go into them in detail. Select a chair, a facilitator or process observer (see below), a note taker, and budget the time during the meeting to allow for plenty of membership participation.

Choose a location that is convenient, choose a date and a time (starting and ending) of the meeting, and prepare an email to be sent to the members you want to come to the meeting. Meeting notices should be sent two weeks in advance and include as much information on the specifics of the meeting as possible, including a motivating paragraph on the main topic(s) of the meeting to get people thinking in advance. Most people won't come to a meeting without an announced agenda. Include in the announcement any information that might help members prepare, i.e., articles, minutes of the last meeting, background memos, etc. If your meeting is designed to attract non-members, publicize it in appropriate places to ensure outreach

Running the meeting: Have your planning committee arrive a little early to go over last minute details and changes in your agenda. Prepare the room by placing the chairs in a circle, if possible. Provide any refreshments, if desired. Make literature available if it is an outreach meeting. Make sure people know and are prepared for their prospective roles. Make sure new meeting members are welcomed and made to feel comfortable. You may want to assign someone to be a greeter just for this purpose.

The chair is responsible for the overall conduct of the meeting by keeping an overview of your progress on the agenda, assuring the involvement of everyone, and helping move the meeting forward. They should start the meeting on time. First, have everybody introduce themselves and share some appropriate bit of information about themselves. A sign-in sheet should be used to get new names for future meeting notices. Keep this covert. Sign it yourself first to encourage others to do so.

Review the planned agenda, including times for agenda items, and briefly motivate each agenda item. Make sure everyone knows the ground rules for discussion, if any. You may want to make rules on who can speak, for how long, and at what points during the meeting. Then stick to them throughout the entire meeting. Follow the agenda once it is approved.

Make sure the note taker is ready. The note taker is responsible for recording who was at the meeting, the approved agenda, and any substantive decisions and/or discussions that arise in the course of the meeting.

Keep the meeting moving but don't rush past people. Make sure everyone is allowed to speak and that no one dominates the discussion. One way of dealing with a meeting in which many people want to speak is to keep a stack, or list, of people who have indicated that they want to say something. This prevents the potential chaos of everyone just jumping in when they have something to say, and the problem of making sure that no one gets consistently missed by the chair.

It is important to **acknowledge that people from different backgrounds have different kinds of expectations** that must be respected. New people may sit back and look interested without saying much. This may be because the discussion or terms used are over their heads, because they feel more like a guest than a member, or because they really don't have anything to add. Try and figure out which reason it is. Invite quiet people to speak, but don't pressure them. Always be aware of potential barriers to participation. Gender, race, class, and age are things that may cause these barriers, so be conscious of how these factors are being dealt with at meetings. Create clear structure and have good facilitation to ensure that you maintain an atmosphere in which everyone can be comfortable being themselves and participating.

Make sure no one is left behind. If people are using acronyms or terms that new members might not understand, ask them to explain. Preferably, don't ask, "Does everybody know what A.B.C. stands for?" This might intimidate a potential member. It's just as easy to say "By the way, A.B.C. stands for..." Or, as the facilitator, you can ask for clarification; this lets other members know that it's okay not to know everything. Above all, avoid being condescending!

Make sure everyone who wants to speak gets a chance. This can be tricky. Some people have something to say but will only speak if asked a direct question; others are mortified at the thought of being called on to contribute in front of everyone. Sometimes, people really don't have anything to say that hasn't already been said. A good way to give everybody a chance to speak without singling out anyone is to go around the room, asking everyone to give their opinion on the matter. This can also speed up discussion on a topic. Above all, you should not allow those with naturally assertive styles to interrupt, or otherwise block, the contributions of other, less assertive members.

Talk to people after the meeting. If someone didn't speak up during the meeting, ask them what they thought of the meeting afterward. Thank them for coming, and let them know you value input from everyone, even at their first meeting.

Choosing a Campaign and Course of Action

As Frederick Douglass famously said, "without struggle, there is no progress... power concedes nothing without a Demand." A great deal of the work of any YDSA chapter will be spent on action, as part of a strategic campaign for social change. Democratic socialism is about fighting for structural changes in our society, empowering the oppressed and building a movement to challenge capitalism, sexism, racism, homophobia, and imperialism, and having a vision for a better, more just future.

There are plenty of struggles that YDSA supports, such as defending affirmative action, increasing access to reproductive and sexual healthcare, including abortion, for all, ending U.S. imperialist conquest abroad, shifting away from our reliance on dirty and unhealthy energy sources and ending environmental racism, and redirecting our collective tax dollars to benefit all of us through quality public services. These are all struggles we can engage in, and they all have elements that not only create change but empower people to make sure that the improvements truly last.

Since YDSA is out to transform society, and since we are interested in many important issues, many chapters often have difficulty deciding where to focus their attention. Consider these questions: Are some members particularly interested in one issue and willing to devote time to work on it? Is there an issue of local relevance that you could work on together with the community? Is the rest of YDSA working on a national project in which your chapter could play a role?

The group taking on the campaign should hold a brainstorming session in which ideas are thrown out without criticism. Next, discuss and evaluate each idea and determine, as a group, the best course of action. List the ideas on paper. Decide: what are the best reasons (pressuring the Administration, educating students, etc.) and methods for taking action.

Possible types of activities include:

Educational Speaking to groups or organizing forums, leafleting, writing letters to editors or op-ed columns, tabling at shopping malls or public events, teach-ins, etc.

Making Opposition Visible - Rallies, street theater, banner hangs, vigils, marches, symbolic action, etc.

Influencing elected representatives - Writing, calling, emailing, petitions, lobbying, etc.

Actively withdrawing consent and compliance - Refusal of cooperation (as with the war effort, soldiers refusing to fight) boycotts, strikes, etc.

Disruption - Direct action and civil disobedience. YDSA advocates nonviolent resistance.

A good YDSA campaign or project should consider several things:

WHO do you need to convince? Who will be receptive to the message? If these are two different audiences, have a message for both or make your main message appeal to them both. Who can be reached? Always remember that the secret of successful organizing is that trying to convert people who disagree with you totally should not be your focus. Your attention should be more geared toward getting those who remain undecided to support your position, encourage those who agree with you to engage in more activity, and empower those who are active to become confident organizers in their own right.

WHAT is our message? What symbols, images, slogans, props, colors, sound bites, etc. express our message?

WHERE is the best location? Is there a location at which we can directly confront some aspect of the issue in question or reach crowds of people? Where are your exit routes? Where is the best place to be visible? What are the hazards?

WHEN will the action be most effective? When will people be around?

HOW will we carry out this action? Who will be doing what? A powerful action has an entrance and exit strategy, and a climactic moment in between. What will that be? How will you know when it's over?

Organizing Teach-Ins

Teach-ins are educational events or small-scale mini-conferences. Depending on how ambitious you get, they are fairly easy to organize, highly effective educational outreach tools for a chapter. Essentially, you are asking students to take time out of their schedules to attend another class or two. What you are promising them is a well thought out, insightful look at a critical issue. Some of the most important considerations in organizing a teach-in are getting compelling speakers, having good publicity, and getting an accessible venue. If these are done, there is no limit to your potential. It is important to remember though, that no matter how small your turnout may be if even one person is exposed to new ideas, it was worth the time. Here are some points that will help you host a successful teach in:

Choosing a Topic

In today's world, there is no shortage of issues to be angry about, though of course it's definitely most useful to choose an issue that supports campaigns you are running. (See previous section "Choosing a Campaign and Course of Action.") For example, if you're trying to force the campus clinic to provide the morning after pill, it might be useful to have a teach-in on the general right-wing assault on reproductive healthcare and how it ties into what's happening on campus. If you pick a topic that is not on the public's radar screen, however, be sure and do extra organizing. If the U.S. is about to invade a country, more people will be interested. If you want to explain universal healthcare to students who probably don't pay their own medical bills, you will have to do the organizing and publicity to convince them that this is an issue that affects them. Hot-button issues in national and international politics are important to consider; however, the best topics are ones with a direct relevance to your audience. If in doubt, look at your local headlines and watch the local news. Listen to the catch phrases, and look past them to see the bigger issue. Furthermore, as an organizer, you should pick an issue that people can get involved in immediately. If your YDSA chapter is not addressing this issue through a campaign, you should plan the event so that attendees can hook up with a local organization that is doing work on this issue.

Speakers

Depending on your location and your topic, appropriate speakers will vary. The goal is to find a speaker who can eloquently and intelligently express your point of view. Depending on the issue, call local organizations that would be able to provide good speakers. If you're hosting a teach in on labor issues, call a local union; if you're having a teach-in on civil rights or affirmative action, call your local NAACP chapter or contact the Black Radical Congress; if you're having a teach-in on civil liberties, call the ACLU. They will probably be willing to speak, you just have to ask. The worst

thing you could hear is “no.” College professors also usually make great speakers, and if members of your own chapter or other student leaders on campus feel confident about pertinent topics, by all means, lead the event yourself! You can always ask the national YDSA office for resources like fact sheets, related articles, talking points, or do a little research yourself. It’s a good idea to feel confident articulating the democratic socialist perspective on a wide range of issues, and this is a great way to practice and develop those skills.

Cold Calls

One thing that you definitely need to understand is that “cold calls” are okay. Here’s what you say: “Hi, my name is (Buffy Summers), and I’m calling on behalf of the Young Democratic Socialists of America at (Sunnydale University). We’re putting on a teach-in about (Environmental Justice) and we were wondering if y’all would be able to provide a speaker about how this affects (low-income people).” If you’ve never done one, a “cold call” is surprisingly easy: you look up the number in the yellow pages or online, write it down, and call ‘em up. Yes, it does take a little bit of nerve, but the more you do, the easier it gets. Hate to say it, but sometimes you’ll have to make a lot of these. If you need to get a speaker on a labor issue, look up “Labor Organizations” in the yellow pages, and just start going through. As soon as they answer, give your spiel. When it’s over, the receptionist will put you through to who you need to speak to.

Event

When everything is in place for the teach-in and the publicity drive is underway, it is time to start thinking about the actual event. It would be great to print up a program, not only listing the speakers, but also including a brief introduction to YDSA/Democratic Socialism. The day before the event, it is never a bad idea to call your speakers and reconfirm. Be sure to make clear what their topic is and what the other panelists will be speaking about. At the event, be sure to set up a table. This table should be made available to your guest speakers to distribute their literature. Also, you should have YDSA literature on hand and a sign-up sheet. At an appropriate point, plug YDSA. Mention your meeting time and invite all interested people to attend. If you have events planned, announce them. This is best done in the introduction or the conclusion. The next day, or soon after, call your speakers and thank them. Also, be sure to personally thank everyone who worked to make the teach-in happen.

Organizing Rallies

Rallies are all different and the tone of a rally depends greatly on its focus. An anti-war protest is very different than a rally calling on the City Council to raise the minimum wage. There are a few general considerations that are common to all rallies, though:

Location

As with everything else, location is crucial. Depending on the size and scope of the rally, appropriate locations will vary. The main things to consider are visibility and accessibility. Be sure your location is somewhere people can get to at the time of the rally, and that it is visible to the surrounding community. Also, be sure it’s not too big. If your rally of 100 people only fills up a tenth of the park, it looks a lot smaller than if you’re on the steps of the courthouse. Be sure to find out if a permit is required for the location. Calling your local police department or parks department will put you in the right direction.

Sound

A bullhorn is fine for 100 people or so, but you may want to rent a sound system for anything larger than that. Generally speaking, wireless amplifiers can be rented for less than \$50. Be sure and check the batteries! Do not let strangers near the sound system. Trust us. Disruptive people will come to your rally and will want to speak. If you let them, they will say things that are not helpful and only serve to derail the event. That said, not all people who express an interest in speaking publicly are like this. Just be aware that once you hand over the mic, there is no accounting for the message (or even the medium of language), and you may find your event being identified with things you didn't say. It can be quite beautiful, however, to empower people to share with others and to open the channel so that more people can participate in the discourse, but this scenario tends to require more patience and respect than you could expect to spontaneously present itself. If that is something your group is interested in exploring, make sure you think about how to do it, and how people can take away a larger message from the event, that is enriched by people's vignettes, but not totally subsumed by it.

Speakers

Again, this will vary depending on your focus. Generally, it's better to have a few short speeches rather than one long speech. Try and find people who you know are lively and fiery speakers, and ask them to speak for five minutes. No matter how great a speech, people tend to lose their focus after more than a couple of minutes. Consider asking people from different groups or communities. If this issue affects many different parts of the community (as virtually every issue does), or has several organizations working on it, be sure that the widest range of speakers is represented. Consider diversity as you ask people to speak. Always remember: different strokes for different folks. While one person may respond to a Marxist analysis of a problem, another might be moved by a faith-based point of view. (Side note on religion: The Left ranges from atheists to devoutly religious people, so this is always a stickler. Some people hate rallies that involve invocations, praying, and spiritual songs. But for some people, the struggle is rooted in their spiritual faith. There's no right or wrong answer, this is just a good thing to keep in mind.)

MC

Be sure you have someone to be the "Master of Ceremonies." Much like any other facilitator, they'll have to get things started, introduce the speakers, and make sure everything goes smoothly. If you have one person emceeing and/or leading chants, someone else should be nearby. People have a way of wanting to talk to whoever has a megaphone, and it's very difficult to talk and chant at the same time.

Entertainment

Some people only like to march and chant, march and chant. However, most folks want to have their spirits lifted a little. Music, puppets, street theater, and other forms of gaiety can help make an action both fun and effective. Colorful puppets are a typical favorite with the media as well. Depending on the action, this might not be appropriate, but having at least one song is always nice. If you want people to sing along, pick something everybody knows, and bring along the lyrics on some leaflets. (Not many know "The Internationale." Most people do know "This Land Is Your Land.") If you can't find anyone to play music, try setting up a boombox with your sound system. If you're having a stationary rally rather than a march, you can play political music as you set up. This sets a festive, upbeat mood for the event and definitely helps attract a crowd. A cheap, easy

way to make your own entertainment is to turn five-gallon buckets into drums. You can get these buckets for free from lots of restaurants. Just drill two holes, and run a string through, and you can make dozens of drums for people to play at a rally (this is great for a march). Allegedly, five-gallon buckets also nicely cover tear-gas canisters.

Chants

A fun pre-rally activity is thinking up chants. Have someone at the rally with a list, ready to get people going, perhaps between speakers. Make sure the slogans are clear and easy to say over and over. Be original, and type of some of the chants on leaflets to hand out. Keep these chants going during the rally!

Signs, banners, leaflets

Be sure and have some signs for people. Most folks won't think to bring a sign, and those that do might not have the message you want. Make big banners that passing cars can see. Have informative leaflets to pass out that include your chapter's contact info. Pass around a sign-up sheet. You may want to set up a table with your literature, buttons, etc.

Security

Depending on your focus, the need for security will vary. If you feel that you are holding an event or action where security may be necessary, please reach out to someone from YDSA/DSA national for more information about how to approach this.

Handling

Press Any event on a college campus is likely to garner press attention. Campus protest has become a hot button issue, and you should be prepared to deal with press of all types at your event. Ideally, you have prepared a press advisory and sent it out in advance of your event. Have a press release available for reporters at the event (this is basically the article you'd want published, because sometimes lazy reporters do just that). Also, have a press person clearly identified with a name tag who has practiced giving a concise message about why you are holding the rally. Contact the national office for more resources on working with the press.

Ending

Surprisingly, this is easy to overlook. Be sure your rally has a clearly defined end. Perhaps something that leaves people feeling upbeat and gives them a clear step to take. Maybe a song. Keep an eye out as the rally breaks up. Police have been known to target individuals leaving a demonstration.

Traveling

Major national protests and conferences are a good chance to combine the fight for social justice with good old road-trippin' fun. Piling into a van and traveling to DC for a big protest is a great way to build chapter solidarity as well. Out of town protests can be a good way to energize a chapter and get new people involved.

Be sure though, that as you plan the trip, you don't forget to plan what to do afterward. Chapters often have meteoric experiences around out of-town protest. A flurry of organizing culminates in fifteen or twenty people traveling to a protest, only to be followed by a slow dwindling afterward because no one knows what to do now. Trips to protests are a supplement to local organizing, and should never be the sole focus.

What Does a Successful and Effective Chapter Look Like?

No YDSA chapter looks the same, as structures and activities should reflect the background and interests of its leaders and active members. The following are guidelines that your chapter can follow to help structure and direct your chapter toward success:

- ☒ Hold elections for officers for your chapter. We recommend holding these elections at the end of the semester, so there are Leaders who can hit the ground running at the beginning of the next semester.
- ☒ Hold meetings for your chapter at least once per month, and organize at least one (1) political event and (1) educational event within the semester. A political or educational event may take the form of a film screening, organizing a talk with an invited speaker, group participation in a community event or charity, a social event, etc.
- ☒ Write and submit at least one article for The Activist per semester. YDS has a national blog called The Activist, devoted to highlighting the work of YDS chapters and the broader student movement. Sign up to be a regular writer here.

YDSA AND LABOR SUPPORT WORK

The Importance of Labor Support Work

The labor movement empowers working people through collective action. It is the means through which workers can place a check on the prerogatives of capitalists to do whatever they want in the pursuit of profit. Furthermore, the organizing strength of the working class is a key force for broader social change in our society. For these reasons, we have a stake in the strength of the labor movement.

It is through labor support work that activists will gain a better understanding of union struggles along with the promise of hope and change they hold for working people. There is also tremendous potential in an alliance between groups of student socialist activists and unions, especially in a university setting. Both groups have similar interests in fighting to redistribute decision making power to the larger community and away from the university administration and trustees who represent big business interests. We can learn a lot from unions about building well organized, effective, democratic organizations. Chances are that if a YDSA chapter at a given campus decides to do labor support work, it will be filling an important space left by activists looking for flashier issues. When doing union support work, remember that our role as YDSAers is that of assisting - not directing - in strike supports and union drives.

The University As a Corporation

Universities are more than sites of learning - they are also corporations (be they private or public corporations). Like any other corporation, universities can and often do attempt to deny their workers' basic rights. As a result, we often do not need to look beyond our own campuses to find labor support work. Support might revolve around the basic right of workers to unionize. Workers at universities like workers at any place of employment often have to struggle to win a decent reward/recognition for their labor. YDSA activists have a particularly important role to play in on campus struggles. As student activists we have a unique position in the university - we are its "customers." At times, we may not feel that we have much power, but compared to non-union workers, we can have a lot of influence. We also have less to lose which gives us more freedom to speak.

Universities and colleges often like to present themselves as institutions imbued with a high moral purpose - institutions in no way implicated in the perpetuation of social justice. An examination of a university's behavior as a corporation in such areas as labor relations, investment decisions, and interaction with the larger community can explode any such image. Universities, like any other corporation, will often put its own financial interests above human need. As democratic socialists, we are committed to making human need rather than the desire for profit the driving force in societal decisions. The commitment to changing society as a whole can find expression in the struggle to change the priorities of our universities.

A good public image is often of deep concern to a university. Within the context of a labor dispute, student activists can do concrete support for the union by simply publicizing anti-union behavior of the university. It is also integral to demonstrate to the university that the campus and larger community is behind the workers and their union. Organizing broad based support for the union on campus and in the community is a concrete and extremely important form of labor support work. Again, one should always consult with, and gain the permission of, the union before taking any action.

Other groups working to expose the university's corporate nature are also potential sources of support for the union's efforts. These groups might include those working against the university's investments in fossil fuels or those working against university expansion. All of these groups have a common interest in demonstrating the university's true nature as a corporation. Not only is there a moral basis for cooperation between those doing labor support and those working on other aspects of the university as a corporation (we are all committed to putting human need before profit), there is a practical basis too (we share a common enemy and goal).

Labor support work on campuses, just like other activities around the university's role as a corporation, can be a deeply important factor in the radicalizing of students. An institution that may previously have seemed benign is now shown to be implicated in the perpetuation of social injustice. As democratic socialists, we are committed to supporting the struggles of working people to gain a better life. We are also committed to showing how a society whose driving force is private profit rather than human need will have its institutions warped by those priorities. Labor support work on campuses as elsewhere offers ample opportunity for fulfilling both commitments.

How to Support a Union Organizing Drive or Strike on Your Campus

YDSA members can play a vital role in establishing such organizations. It is advisable to let union organizers know about your politics and planned support activities. By developing an honest, healthy, long term relationship with campus unions, you will be setting the stage for fruitful coalition work in the future.

Organizing is a very delicate process, so almost all activities must take place with prior approval from, and in close coordination with, the local union organizers. Be wary of individuals who may not represent the whole organizing or strike committee, but suggest some activity to you. Only when workers have elected a leadership can one worker properly speak on behalf of the union.

If a union is organizing at your campus, introduce yourself to the organizer and let them know that you are available to help if it is ever needed. There may be invaluable, if not particularly exciting, work for you to do in the union office itself. Working side by side with union activists to put out mailers or plan an event is a great way to get to know the people involved in the drive and to discover what issues and problems they are wrestling with.

Furthermore, there may be a special role for you as students of the college or university. The key here is to put the university on the defensive if it tries to distribute anti-union literature, or otherwise tries to slow the organizing efforts. Anti-union tactics often include the use of agent provocateurs in attempts to circulate false information and/or claim to legitimately represent a potential bargaining unit. Also, many organizing drives have two conjunctive strategies - covert and overt.

Theoretically, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) provides protection for open organizing: "You can't be fired for organizing activities." Unfortunately, this law is easily circumvented and the process of filing a legal complaint is such a long and involved one that the pro-union employees may have all found work elsewhere before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruling comes down in favor of the wronged organizers. It is, therefore, important to exercise discretion and confidentiality when participating in an organizing drive.

In the case of an organizing drive or a strike, community pressure on the university is an important element in the campaign. Call to the university's avowed commitment to freedom of debate if the administrators refuse to allow union organizers or activists equal time to compensate for anti-union activists. You may also want to flood the campus newspapers with letters to the editor in support of the union.

During the organizing drive (which culminated in victory in May of 1988) at Harvard University among the clerical and technical workers, DSA Youth Section activists played a supportive role over the course of several years. They raised money for the union drive while it was independent of an international union, then continued to be actively supportive once it affiliated with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), by helping to carry out rallies, working to educate students, gaining endorsements from community organizations, and pressuring the university administration to avoid union busting tactics by highlighting the power differential between a prestigious university and a group of its employees, particularly female employees, as 83% of the relevant group was.

In the case of the 1984-85 strike at Yale University among the clerical workers, the support of the dining hall workers was what ultimately forced the university to negotiate a fair contract with the striking workers. That was a situation where a strong pro-union sentiment among students was a key element in the success of the strike - again YDSA members were instrumental in organizing students to understand the situation from the union's perspective. The most important thing to keep in mind in the case of a strike is the importance of solidarity in the face of the employer's attempts to "divide and conquer."

The strike at Yale and the organizing drive at Harvard raised a lot of important issues about the nature of the university as an employer. The experience of supporting the union through a difficult period made the unions' victories very personally rewarding to the Youth Section activists involved.

Helping the organizers create a strong, pro-union sentiment on campus was key to combatting the university's anti-union rhetoric, and was, therefore, both important to the workers' success and served a broader educational purpose among students. This is important in the long run to improve societal attitudes towards unions, but also in the short run to educating students so that they would be reluctant to scab (fill jobs of people out on strike) on the workers in the event of a strike. Students are, after all, a huge potential strike breaking resource for a university if they are not educated as to why it is an immoral thing to do.

EDUCATION

Weaving Democratic Socialism Into Your Work

Unlike most progressive student organizations, YDSA places a high priority on political education. We don't think that activism alone is the answer. We want to give students and young people a foundation for a lifetime of struggle, not just provide a fan club to be in during college. Therefore, we engage in ongoing reflection on long term goals and socialism.

Rather than being something dry, completely abstract, and isolated from our day-to-day organizing, theory can be tied to every action you take or campaign you conduct as a YDSA chapter. A democratic socialist perspective is keenly attuned to feminism, anti-racism, and anti-heterosexism. Our ideological base and systemic analysis give us a foundation not seen in other multi-issue, progressive groups, while our internal democracy and willingness to publicly debate and discuss sets us apart from sectarian socialist organizations. At the same time, we recognize that while having the humanist impulse that leads many people to democratic socialism may be easy, learning to be able to justify and explain it to others takes some work.

Learning about socialism, which has a rich and often confusing history, can be intimidating. However, if it is done in the context of a fun social environment, it can be exciting. For YDSAers, democratic socialist ideas and vision infuse our organizing, and our political perspective and attention to theory is a constantly evolving tool to inform our work. We must constantly reflect on the lessons of past movements to help us figure out how to organize better now. Smart, well-educated activists are better activists, because they make stronger arguments, recruit more people to our cause, and better represent YDSA. The trick is to make sure your chapter doesn't turn into a group of coffee shop intellectuals but emphasizes a chief tenet of our mission, which is to educate ourselves and others. Remember, socialism is a balance between theory and practice.

While all YDSA organized events should have an informational component, some are more clearly educational than others. Teach-ins, speakers, and film screenings are examples of good, easy-to-organize activities that serve to raise awareness around an issue. Teach-ins are dealt with in the Events Section of the Manual. As the youth section of DSA, YDSA chapters have access to many widely respected speakers. In addition, there are, of course, people in your area who can speak both to local issues and to larger issues from a local point of view. Some speakers will want payment, and this can be raised amongst members, from your school, or from local ally groups, churches, and unions. See below for some more inspiration for different events your chapter could host:

Films: Showing one or more films is perhaps the easiest event you can organize, though it's important to include discussion afterward so you can bring up the democratic socialist perspective. Choose a film that will draw both members and the general public or student body. If possible, serve refreshments. Have a YDSAer introduce the film and make YDSA announcements afterward.

Reading Groups: Reading and discussing a book as a group is a great way to both learn and generate dialogue around a topic. Your chapter could vote on a book, essay, or article to read as a group, and then schedule a time to discuss it. Hearing others thoughts and perspectives after having read something yourself will heighten your understanding of the work. Starting out with books that are accessible to the whole group will make these groups more fun and effective. See the book list at the end for some ideas!

Activist Skill Workshops: Having an occasional training is a great thing for any YDSA chapter. Trainings can be about tactics, like civil disobedience, or deeper issues, like challenging white supremacy. You may want to contact the national office and raise money to bring someone in from out of town, or you might decide that someone you know locally could do a good job. Workshops can be geared just for YDSA members, but will usually have an appeal to other activists as well. Who knows, they might be ready to join after coming to a kick-ass workshop. The national office has a list of great organizing trainings geared towards YDSAers or offered by other student activist groups.

Ideology

Remember: YDSA is a democratic organization. While the broad tenets of democratic socialism unite our organization, we don't force our members to accept a particular "party line" or let the finer points of debate divide us. YDSA members run a broad spectrum of beliefs, ranging from libertarian socialist to democratic Marxist. Some members are atheists, while others are religious. More than anything, YDSA is a place where people have a vision for an emancipated society that informs their work. We want all our members to be "leaders"; we encourage all members to read and educate themselves. Conferences are an especially good time for members of different chapters to come together and learn from each other.

CONCLUSION

We hope you have found this manual to be informative, useful, and instructive. It is our goal to provide YDSA members with the materials and insight they need to carry out effective work. But it is important to remember that any organizing manual can only be useful up to a point. Texts like this can give perspective and ideas, but when it comes to the socialist movement, there is no playbook. There is no ready made system or theory that will give you a perfect plan.

The goal of democratic socialism is to create a society where the creative powers and potential of society are fully unchained from capitalism. Our movement also must be ready to unlock our creative power as organizers to be bold, innovative, even unpredictable at times. We should be actively seeking out methods and tactics that push the boundaries of what is possible. The key to political action is building the creative and collective power we need to succeed, and supporting each other so we can have the space to grow, learn, and thrive.

We hope you will take what you learn here in this manual as a foundation that you can build on, not as scripture. The future of our movement will be written in motion, by you. We hope the lessons in this book, and in your YDSA experience, will furnish you with lessons for struggle that you can apply for years to come.

Solidarity,

Ryan Mosgrove

National Campus Organizer

Young Democratic Socialists of America

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